



A HELPING HAND

Written by Payal Dhar

Illustrated by Vartika Sharma



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PRATHAM BOOKS

A HELPING HAND

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Dear... well, you know who you are. And it's not like you're ever going to see this letter.

Miss told me that I had to be your mentor and show you around because you are a new student. I didn't know what a 'mentor' is, so I looked it up in the dictionary. Anyway, she didn't tell me anything about that.

Ali and Gaurav and Sumi and Rani, they kept asking me about it when we were going home from school. I told them that I didn't know what they were talking about, but that's not true. How can I not know?

See, you made me lie to my friends.

Yours sincerely,

Me







Hi again,

Ma says that it is not good to stare at people, but I can see that everyone stares at you. They stare at me too because I have to hang around with you and be your 'mentor'. Why did you come to our school? Why couldn't you continue going to whatever school you went to earlier?

Do you know what happened yesterday? Gaurav, Ali and two of their friends from Class VII cornered me after school to ask about you-know-what. They took my bag and wouldn't give it back. Then they threw it into the thicket by the side of the road and I had to scramble down into the mountainside to get it. I tore my shirt and Ma was angry with me.

This is all your fault.

Me



Hello,

I keep telling them that they can ask you whatever they want to know. What's the point of asking me? How am I supposed to know why you have that thing or how it works?

To be really honest, I can't say I'm not curious myself or that I don't have the same questions the others are asking me. Yes, I noticed it the first day when you came into the classroom. I saw how you did everything with one hand and how your left hand never moved. At first I couldn't tell what the problem was. Then, when I came closer, I saw that something wasn't quite right. It looked weird, like it was covered in plastic or something. Then I thought it was a toy hand. It took me some time to understand.

Also, I saw what happened at lunch.

See you,

Me





Hello,

My oldest sister, the one who's studying engineering in Delhi, called today. I told her, "There's a girl in my class and she has a fake hand," and she said that the term is 'prosthetic hand'.

Listen, I have some advice for you. You may be new and all, but if you want people to stop staring at you and talking about you, you have to stop standing in the corner all the time. Why don't you play with us? Why don't you come on the swing? Everyone loves the swing. It's been two weeks, and you can jolly well come by yourself. I am not going to be your minder for ever.

Sometimes I don't know what to say to you.

Me





Hi again,

After the lunch incident that day, I've been watching you. I'm just curious. Is it weird to have one hand? Is it only your hand or is your entire arm fake, sorry, prosthetic?

Today, Sumi, Gaurav and I walked to school together. They were playing a game they made up called One-Hand Challenge. The rule is, you have to do things with one hand. Like, packing your bag or buttoning your shirt.

Sumi couldn't tie her shoelaces and she forgot about it and tripped and fell. She got a cut on her chin. Miss saw it and, even though she put some antiseptic cream on it, she scolded Sumi for being careless. "You can't run around in the mountains with your shoelaces untied. What will happen if you fall while going home or something?" I think adults worry too much.

Yours truly,

Me







Hi,

Do you know what a coincidence is? It's like when you talk about something and the same thing happens sometime later in a completely unrelated way. In my last letter, I was telling you about Sumi and the shoelaces, and then, today, I saw you tying your shoelaces. Wow, that was awesome! I think you did it faster than I can do it with two hands. If you were my friend, I would challenge you to a shoelace-tying race. Or no, maybe I would ask you to teach me how to do it with one hand.

I have to confess, I did try to tie my shoelace with one hand when I got home. But it's impossible. How do you do it? Maybe I'll ask you tomorrow.

Curious,

Me

Hi,

So, after what you said, I've tried to do a lot of things with only one hand, but it's so difficult! I still don't get how you do it, like having a bath, wearing your clothes, packing your bag. Since that day at lunch, I did realize that you have to do some things differently, but it's not like you don't do almost everything the rest of us do.

Listen, I'm sorry about what I said earlier... about playing with us. I guess you were just feeling shy. And also about coming on the swing. I tried and it's hard to get your balance if you don't hold it with two hands. But you're great in the jungle gym, even if you don't hang from the bars, and you can run really fast, even faster than Ali, who won the first prize at Sports Day.

Bye,

Me





Hello!

That movie was really funny, no? I laughed so much that my stomach hurt and it was like I was crying. I always like it when they show movies in school. It means no classes.

Last time, before you came to our school, they showed this movie about a tiger cub who got lost. It was quite scary, mostly because it was a true story. Later someone found it and managed to get it back to its family. True stories like that are called documentaries, did you know that? Tiger cubs are cute, no? Last year, there was a puppy near our house. It was very cute too, but it grew up and then it wasn't so cute any more.

Got to go now!

Me





Hello, hello!

Did you know? I was so surprised when I saw you on the bus. I had no idea my father worked in the same place as yours! But I'm so happy you came for the office picnic, because last year when they took us, there were no other children my age and I got really bored.

Okay, I'm really tired, so I'm going now. See you in school tomorrow.

Me







Hi,

I think I should warn you, Principal Sir becomes slightly insane whenever Annual Day comes along. He might yell at you – he yells at everyone – so don't take it personally. My ma says that he's under a lot of pressure because our Annual Day performance reflects on him. I'm not sure what that means, but he does look stressed out. Did you see his hair? It was like he touched a loose wire and got an electric shock! Though I think it was very mean of Rani to put a frog in his chair.

Okay, I'm going now before he catches me writing this letter!

Me



Hey,




Your new hand is so cool! No offence, but the old one was a bit boring. It was just... there. The new one is like magic, and you can move the fingers and grip with it! I hope you didn't mind that I asked to shake hands. I just said it before I could think. Maybe tomorrow we can do some experiments to find out if you can lift stuff with it.

Oh! I just realized, the last couple of letters I wrote to you, I didn't mention your prosthetic hand at all. It's like I forgot all about it and wanted to tell you so many other things. The funny thing is, I'm not that curious about your hand anymore. I don't know why.

Your friend,

Me





The Friend-o-Meter Quiz

How good are you at helping people fit in? Take our Friend-o-Meter quiz to find out!

1. Your teacher asks you to show the new student in school around. What do you feel?

- a. Fantastic! A new friend!
- b. Why can't they figure things out themselves?
- c. Uh oh...

3. Your new classmate is having trouble with his lessons. What can you do?

- a. Tell the brainiest student in class to lend him her notes.
- b. Tell the teacher – it's her job to help him.
- c. Ask him if you could help him with his work.

2. A girl in your class walks with a limp. The others laugh at her. What do you do?

- a. Nothing – it's none of your business.
- b. Tell her to ignore them – they're mean.
- c. Ask your classmates to imagine if they were different.

4. The new girl in class is rather shy. She doesn't play with anyone. What can you do?

- a. Let her be – she'll join in when she's ready.
- b. Call her over and make her join in the games.
- c. Go and sit next to her – maybe she'll start a conversation.



Get your score:

1. **a** **b** **c**
 1 2 3

2. **a** **b** **c**
 2 1 3

3. **a** **b** **c**
 3 2 1

4. **a** **b** **c**
 2 1 3

Now add it up. If you've scored...

4-6 points: You are a born friend, always ready to lend a hand. You don't wait for people to ask for help – you're already there, waiting to give it to them.

7-9 points: You are an independent person and feel that people should be too. But that doesn't mean you don't care – you just don't want to force anyone.

10-12 points: You might be a little shy, but you are kind-hearted too. You'll do whatever you can indirectly to help others and make them feel at ease.



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Payal Dhar is a writer and editor. She writes on computers, technology, books, reading, games and travel, and has written on sport in the past. She also writes fiction for children and young adults, and has a number of books under her belt. Find out more at her website <http://writeside.net>.



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Vartika Sharma is an illustrator and collage artist based in New Delhi, India. She likes to make ink + pencil drawings, collages and photographs. Her work is inspired by cinema, old encyclopaedias and supernatural phenomena.

There's a new girl in class and our teacher has asked me to be her friend and show her around. But I'm not sure I want to - she's... not like the rest of us!
A fascinating tale of friendship and fitting in, which tells its story through letters.

Learning to read – level by level. This is a Level 4 book.

**Beginning to Read/
Read Aloud**

For very young children
who are eager to begin
reading and listening to
stories

1

Learning to Read

For children who
recognize familiar
words and can
read new words
with help

2

Reading Proficiently

For older children
who can read with
confidence

4

3

**Reading
Independently**

For children who
are ready to read
on their own



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